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Item 10

UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, August 1991

On a visit to occupied East Timor

Mr Chairman and members of the Sub-Commission,

I have come to Geneva to tell you about my holiday visit to East Timor. It turned out to be anything but a holiday; it was two weeks of shock and fear. Every day my husband and I listened to stories of rape, torture and death.

After a few days, we found we couldn't sleep at night. We lay awake, thinking about the mothers that have lost their babies and the husbands who have lost their wives. I was astounded; these were the most traumatic two weeks of my life. The tragic memories will stay with me forever.

We started our trip from Kupang, West Timor, which I will describe to you for the sake of contrast. It's noisy, smelly and full of life. The streets are so crowded, you can't walk in a straight line. It's poor, but the atmosphere is cheerful. Wherever we went, people smiled and greeted us. This is a typical Indonesian town.

Dili, the capital of East Timor, is very different. The streets were quiet and almost empty. There were soldiers on every street corners and truckloads of armed soldiers frequently drove past. When we met civilians, they didn't smile. The Indonesians looked expressionless and the Timorese looked sad. Even the buildings added to the atmosphere of oppression. Everywhere, we saw ugly, concrete government offices. Most were empty, but they all had imposing signs announcing the government department that was supposed to operate inside.

We quickly became aware of the racial inequality in Dili. Everywhere we went, we asked people where they came from. "Dari mana?" It's a traditional greeting in Indonesia. In all the shops and offices, the answers were: "Dari Bali", "Dari Jakarta", "Dari Sulawesi"... Surabaya, Sumatra, Flores. All the office workers and civil servants that we met were from Indonesia. All the shops, restaurants and businesses were owned by Indonesians. The East Timorese have been pushed aside in their own capital city. As hundreds of new Indonesian settlers arrive on the fortnightly ferry which holds up to nine hundred people, the East Timorese will soon became a minority in their own country. As competition gets fiercer, their economic situation can only get worse.

You can find East Timorese people in the markets, selling small bundles of fruit or vegetables. You can see them working in the fields or breaking rocks to build the rocks. When you see a beggar, or a child suffering from malnutrition, you can be sure that they

are Timorese.

One day on the beach, I made friends with two little girls. They were ten years old and both very pretty. One of them wore a black patch pinned to her dress, to show that she was in mourning. We played in the sand and I practised my Bahasa Indonesia. "Jacqueline," I asked, "do you want to get married?" "No," she said, "I want to be a nun." Her friend nodded in agreement.

We were surprised. It's an unusual ambition, but apparently in East Timor, these girls are not unusual. We visited some nuns who explained that they could not accommodate all the young women who would like to join them. Many have to be turned away. This is an indication of the intense fear that East Timorese children grow up with. As the days went by, we heard so many stories about rape that we could understand why these little girls look to a life in the church for sanctuary and protection.

We heard that a lot of men have been killed because they tried to protect their wives or daughters from rape by soldiers. We were told a sad story by a village chief. I'd prefer not to mention the name of his village for the sake of his safety. His three nieces were out working the fields one day, when they were spotted by a group of nine or ten Indonesian soldiers. The girls ran away, fearing the worst. Two escaped, but the third fell over and she was caught. She was repeatedly raped. The girls told their uncle what had happened and he went to the commander of the troops in that area to make a complaint. The soldiers were duly punished. A few days later, they came back to the family farm and killed three young men in retribution for their punishment.

The chief told us more stories about torture and murder. "So," I said, trying to keep track. "You've lost seven members of your family?" "Oh no," he said, counting on his fingers, and conferring with a younger relative. "Twenty-four."

Of course, as tourists we couldn't visit any prisons, but we met a group of people who live like prisoners. Twenty-five young men spend every night in the sanctuary of a certain church. Their crime was public demonstration. They have been in prison already, but they are afraid to go home. They never go out at night. They live in the constant fear that another excuse will be found to capture and maybe torture them again. As long as Timor is occupied by Indonesia, these men, like many others, have no future. Their names are on blacklists. They can't work. They can't travel.

Whenever the opportunity arose, Timorese people sought us out to communicate their political feelings, so that we could inform the outside world. We spoke to people of all ages and backgrounds. Again and again, we heard the same thing: "Fretilin <u>is</u> the people." We met nobody who was in favour of assimilation. They all want a referendum on the right to self-determination. They are afraid that

a referendum will not take place until the Indonesian settlers have become the majority in East Timor.

I'd like to quote a middle-aged Timorese man, a civil servant with a good position. He said this about assimilation: "I try to accept it in my head, but in my heart I can never accept it. But the young people cannot accept it in their hearts or their heads." This man described how he was forced, with a gun at his back, to sign the petition to incorporate East Timor with Indonesia in 1975.

There are guerrilla units hiding in the hills. They are accompanied by women and children. Although we were invited to go and meet them, we were too scared, but I did lend them my camera with two rolls of film, which we carried out of Indonesia a week later, with up-to-date evidence of the armed resistance.

During our visit, we felt a high tension amongst the people around us. A priest told us he thought the tension is higher now than it has been for years. The world has seen the effort and expense used to free Kuwait. The Timorese have also seen this, after 16 years of violent oppression. They are bitter and disappointed that the world has so far ignored their pleas for help. The Timorese have pinned their hopes on the long-awaited visit of a Portuguese parliamentary delegation, which they were expecting this month. The Timorese hope that this visit will at last provide a means of expressing themselves internationally.

During our visit, we were told by a member of FALINTIL, the armed resistance, that there are 45 battalions in Timor, trying to hunt down all the potential "trouble-makers", prior to this visit. Many people expect arrest and torture.

There <u>will</u> be demonstrations, I am sure, despite the violent repercussions to the demonstrations when the Pope visited Timor. Many people are so full of anger and grief that they no longer seem to care about their personal safety. They have lived through 16 years of hell and they want the world to know about it. No doubt, many of these people will be killed.

Indonesia claims to have done more for East Timor in 16 years than Portugal did in 400. "How true," say the Timorese. "They have raped, killed and tortured more people in 16 years than the Portuguese did in four centuries."

The East Timorese need your help, and they need it now; if, as a people, they are to survive.

Clare Calascione, Geneva, August 1991